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# Landscape Planning under Political Instability – Palestine as a case study

Prepared by: Samar Nazer and Ahmad Abu Hammad

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Landscape is a terminology that is refereeing to an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors" (European Landscape Convention, 2000: Article 1: a). In many instance, such characters are being altered by different natural uncontrollable (i.e. flooding, earthquakes, erosion, etc.) or human controllable activities (i.e. urban expansion, industrial and agricultural activities, built up related infrastructures and services).

Landscape changes, as a result of inter-correlated socio economic and political factors, necessitates the future landscape planning that is concerned with the use of diversified landscape recourses and with how to assign such resources in a way consistent with the people's interests and the nation's goals (Naveh, 1994, Marsh,1991: 2). As a consequence of the strong relations of the landscape with the existing resources, landscape planning is though linked to different related sciences such as landscape ecology, environmental planning, land use planning, spatial planning, and landscape management, for the final aim of attaining a sustainable landscape use.

Generally speaking, landscapes are always under disputation and contestation. These conflicts might arise from either internal disagreement of interests between individual peoples of the same nation, or from external disagreement between two different national entities, which may occur under war or peace time and referred to as "Political instability". Political instability refers to the unstable political condition between two different countries or between two groups of different ethnic, religious, social, economic, and political interests and nature, even though both groups might be in the same country. The main rreasons for landscape conflict can be attributed to:

(i) Political violence and competition for scarce resources such as water and land; (ii) Socio economic and environmental factors; (iii) The lack of adequate opportunity for political participation (Awadallah; 2006); (iv) The existence of fragile governmental structure (Klingebiel, 2002); (v) Ethnic conflict such as in South Africa. (Eghbareih;

2000); (vi) Cultural and religious conflict such as in Northern Ireland; and (vii) Complex conflict that is related to territorial, ethno-nationalism, demographic structure such as what's happening between Israel and Palestine.

All over the world, seventy nine countries has been listed as areas of political conflict, most of them from the developing countries, and are strongly witnessing landscape changes due to political conflicts (UNDP,2005; Awadallah,2006). As an example, the Lebanon civil war 1975-1990 between Christian in the east and Muslim in the west; the conflict in Northern Ireland between the catholic (republican or nationalist) in the west and the protestant (loyalist or unionist) in the east; the conflict between east and west Germany; the conflict in Cyprus between Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot where the green line zone drawn by British in 1963 to divide the island into Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot, followed by armed intervention of the Turkish army in 1974 (Grichting,2007). Recently, the green line is planned to work as memorial trail and bicycle path, which is linked with new green spaces within the historic fabric, and though resulting in a positive effect on the ecosystem (Grichting,2007).

In addition, there are many other conflicts all over the world that witnessed consequent landscape changes, amongst are that in Sudan, Somalia, Sri-lanka, Iraq, Morocco and Algeria for West Sahara Desert; and finally the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis, which is amongst the longest (more than 60 years), the most complicated, controversial, and still existing political conflict.

Palestine is known for its sad history as a centre of both local and international conflict and occupation. As a result of the 1947 partition and the 1948 and the 1967 wars, which have resulted in the occupation of the whole area of Palestine by the Israelis. As a consequence of this tragedy, Palestine encounters between two peoples (Israelis and Palestinians) who claim the same land (Palestine); each has different narratives of the landscape, but remains as a symbol and a main political conflict issue (Said,1999; Benvenisti, 2000).

The landscape of Palestine has always been subjected to dynamic processes of change and continuity. The unstable political conditions, coupled with the consequent change of different governing authorities over the last century have resulted in the absence of proper planning practices in the country. Almost all areas are faced by a wide range of threats varying from poor agricultural practices such as overgrazing to quarrying

which is carried on without any control in some of the valley's most sensitive areas<sup>1</sup>. Construction and domestic waste are also major causes of landscape deterioration; random urban developments sprawl outwards from existing settlements. The situation is further aggravated by the Israeli settlements which cover large areas, and usually stridently located on hilltops representing building types that are quite different from traditional ones, and are served by roads built without regard to landscape values.

In Palestine, the main human-related activities that are being active in altering the landscape are those related to political, social and economic ones.

The political factors are mainly related to the Israeli occupation of the land and the consequent changes in its characters due to the following actions:

1. Construction of Israeli Colonies on the natural landscape.
2. Associated infrastructure (bypass roads, checkpoints, military towers and bases).
3. The segregation wall between Palestine and Israel.

The socio economic factors are those that are either related directly to the Israeli occupation or those related to misbehaviours of the Palestinians themselves with different issues of the landscape.

Very few studies dealt with landscape related issues in Palestine, most of these studies focus on regional scale perspectives and general framework for dealing with important landscape resources, while very limited studies were done concerning local scale planning of landscape. Most of these studies have dealt with one or more elements of the cultural landscape and other related issues to land use planning without providing direct focus to important landscape elements.

**The Palestinian Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) has taken the initiative to prepare Emergency Natural Resources Protection Plan (ENRPP) for the West Bank governorates. This plan represented a first step towards sustainable use of Palestinian natural resources in particular, and towards sustainable development in general. The plan aimed at protecting natural resources and natural and cultural environment of West Bank governorates<sup>2</sup> from environmentally harmful development project and**

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<sup>1</sup> Sensitive area: areas rich in flora and fauna, historical sites, agriculture, view points according to Emergency Natural Resources Protection Plan (ENRPP), that should be protected (MOPIC, 1999b).

<sup>2</sup> Governorate: a term used by Palestinian Authority that represents a county or an administrative unit.

**programs. The ENRPP plan included a Landscape Assessment of the West Bank governorates which surveyed, analyzed, and identified the most valuable and sensitive landscape features as an input to the Protection Plan (MOPIC, 1998a; MOPIC, 1998b; MOPIC, 1999a; MOPIC, 1999b). To that end, the ENRPP contributed to the establishment of a common understanding as to which landscape qualities exist in the area and which areas are most important from a landscape preservation point of view. BATTIR???????? + OTHER NON DIRECT STUDIES LIKE ARIJ + SAMAR STUDY.**

The objectives of this study are: (i) analyze the main factor/s that are related to the Israeli activities, along with their main effects on the landscape, either from the direct or the indirect activities (restriction on the Palestinian land use planning and zoning with its effect on the landscape); (ii) analyze those factors and introduce suggestions for mitigation of these landscape-related consequences, throughout suggested planning alternatives; (iii) study the Palestinian role in altering the landscape, which is evident, due to the social and the economic conditions that are strongly being affected by the occupation, but at the same time they are also partly self directed factors by the Palestinian themselves, resulting in negative landscape effects, such as the lack of sufficient planning and if exists, the lack of appropriate implementing, monitoring systems as well as the overlapping mandates between main actors of the landscape in Palestine; and (iv) to shed light on long-term strategic planning direction adopted by the Palestinian authority toward sustainable use of the landscape.

An important point to be taken into consideration is that one should bear in mind that all of the Israeli activities are not legal and should be eliminated as a first planning alternative in order to restore the original landscape. Though, the study will only deal with general framework outlining temporary mitigation measures of the effect as a second alternative to preserve what is left from the landscape, until the political condition improves.

## **2. THE STUDY AREA**

**Historic Palestine is located in south-west Asia on the Eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Due to its geographical location, it is well known as the crossroads of the old world; the place where Asia and Africa meet both**

**physically and culturally. Historic Palestine comprises an area of about 27,000 km<sup>2</sup>, and has a total population of about 8 million Palestinian Arabs and Jews. The West Bank is located in the central highlands of historic Palestine; the area is bordered by the Jordan River and the Dead Sea in the east and the Green Line (the 1948 cease-fire line) in the north, west and south. It has a varied geology, soil, climate, and vegetation, which leads to a great diversity in landscape pattern, structure and character.**

**The total area of Occupied Palestinian Territory is 6,020 km<sup>2</sup>; divided into the West Bank (5,655 km<sup>2</sup>); the rest of the area consists of Gaza.**

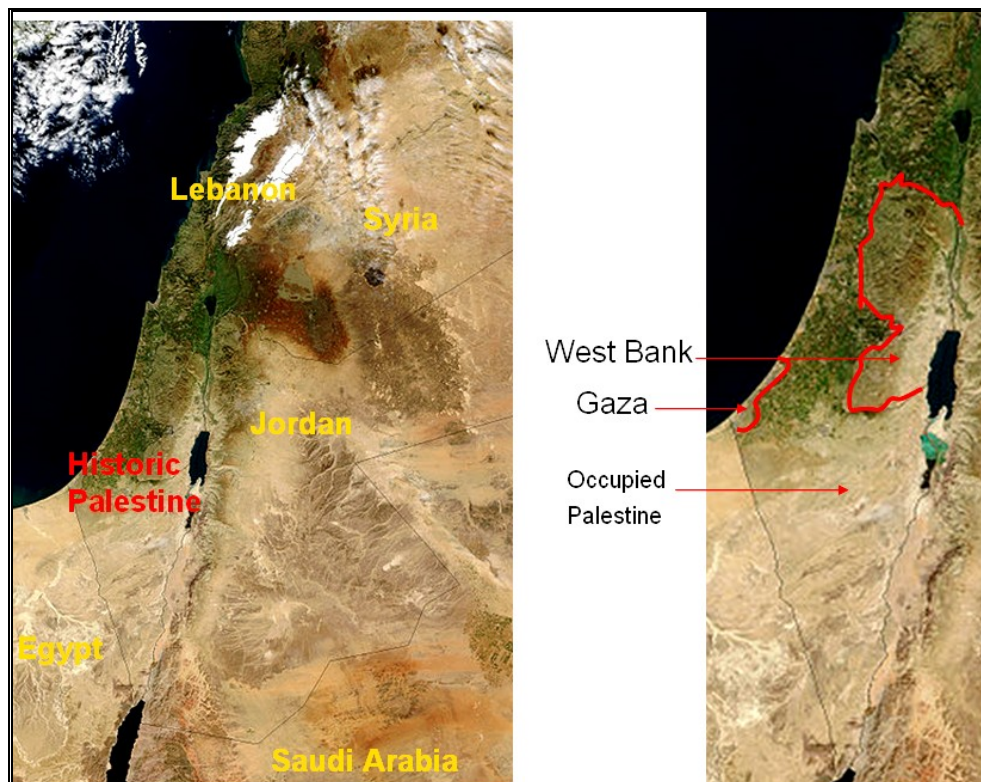
Historic Palestine landscape has always been contested; a landscape that has been transformed by wars and destruction. It has been conquered and ruled by different occupiers and rulers since the Roman times, the Ottomans, the Jordanian rule, the British and lately the Israeli occupation from 1948, 1967 till now.

Historic Palestine, sometimes called the Holy Land, is also known for its tragic history as a centre of both local and international conflict. As a result of the 1947 partition and the 1948 war, the Israelis took over most of the land of the mandated Palestine, leaving two regions; the so-called the Central Mountain of Palestine (West bank); which was governed by the Jordanians, and the Gaza Strip, which was governed by the Egyptians. The country's political map has changed again since the 1967 war, which resulted in the Israeli occupation of these two regions (Figure 1).

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Historical data either published or not, especially those from Palestinian authority reports were utilized to trace out the route of the planning process in landscape related issues. The collected data were analyzed and put into the major contextual framework of the study in order to conclude on major issues and obstacles facing the planning process and to suggest proper strategies to be adopted for effective landscape planning. Interviews with key figures people, stakeholders of the local, regional and national level of planning, as well as representatives of the local people were done. The interviews aimed at revealing major threats to landscape, the obstacles toward attaining proper and sustainable landscape planning, as well as the visionary solutions to the problem, taking into consideration the difficult political circumstance the area is passing through. Most of the factors that were tackled in the interviews represented a

categorical type of data; hence, the analysis depended on assigning different dummy codes to different answers for each question. After coding the whole interview's answers, the data was analyzed using SPSS 10.0.7 procedures (SPSS release 12.0., 2003). Descriptive statistical analysis was carried out for the analysis of the interview's data. The analysis method included a correlation test, cross table analysis, and frequencies to examine relationships between different aspects in relation to the existing landscape practices and problems, as well as the relation of landscape related issues with the different types of the interviewees (i.e. officials, key persons and figures of the community, professionals, etc.) perception and suggestions for suitable landscape planning and conservation process.



**Figure 1:** Location map of the historic Palestine and the consequent 1948 war divisions.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***4.1. Planning Practises and players before 1990's and the Conflict Impacts on the Landscape***

From a Palestinian point of view and as a cause-effect on their landscape, Israel dealt with planning processes in West Bank to serve the Israeli policies, mainly for colonial

purposes. The Israeli Civil Administration was the Supreme authority with regard to planning at the regional and local level. Military orders were often used to implement these policies. Within that context, Palestinian local authorities (municipalities, and village councils), were restricted in the provision of proper planning to serve the needs of their communities. Any development outside municipal borders, should acquire permission from the Israeli civil administration Higher Planning Council (*Al tanzeem*); which was in most cases difficult to obtain. At the same time, and from the Israeli point of view concerning the practice of influential effects on the Palestinian landscape, significant efforts and practices in establishing and expanding the colonies in the West Bank, both in terms of the area of land confiscated and in terms of population inside the constructed colonial agglomeration, with and approximate number of 380,000 Israeli settlers are now living in such colonial agglomeration located into the West Bank, including those established in East Jerusalem (Yehezkel Lein, 2002). The resultant effects of the combined actions of the Israeli on the Palestinian landscape are the:

1. Appreciable negative impacts on the different elements of the landscape (color, texture, clarity, unity, etc.). This negative impact resulted from the direct effects of the colonial activities (i.e. colonial built-up areas, infrastructure and associated services), which caused inclusions of odd elements into the original existing structure of the landscape (Figure 2).
2. Restrictions on the urban expansion of the Palestinians, with a major pressure on the internal built-up landscape, resulting in almost the total loss of the green structure and the internal scenic elements of the landscape, which were originally used for local inhabitant's recreation and amusement.
3. Indirect effect of the Israeli colonies on the landscape, which is obvious from the pollution (either from industrial or residential waste) of the lands that are surrounding the colonial built-up areas, causing the deterioration of major elements of the surrounding landscape.
4. Most of the important landscape areas of the West Bank (i.e. forested and nature reserves) have been declared, by military orders, as closed military and security areas, depriving the Palestinian from preserving them for their benefits. Hence, such important landscape areas were subjected to continuous neglect and a consequent deterioration.





**Figure 2:** Colonial expansion effects on the landscape (left) compared to original untouched landscape.

#### ***4.2. Planning Practises and players after the 1990's and the Conflict Impacts on the Landscape***

According to the Oslo agreement, the West Bank was divided into three main areas: A, B and C areas with different responsibilities and actors in each area (Figure 3). Area A is under the full control of the Palestinian Authority from a political, administrative and security point of view. Area B has shared responsibilities between the Palestinians and the Israeli, where it is controlled administratively by the Palestinian Authority but from security and political point of view, it is controlled by the Israeli Authority. Finally, area C has a full control by the Israeli. The division of responsibilities in these three areas, and from a planning point of view, has resulted in diverse actions and effects on the existing landscape, both on the internal (inside main cities and towns) and on the external landscapes (outside cities and towns). Investigations dealing with different actors, their roles and effects on reshaping landscape, along with related planning concerns are major issues to be tackled, in order to achieve proper planning and preservation of what left from the Palestinian landscapes.



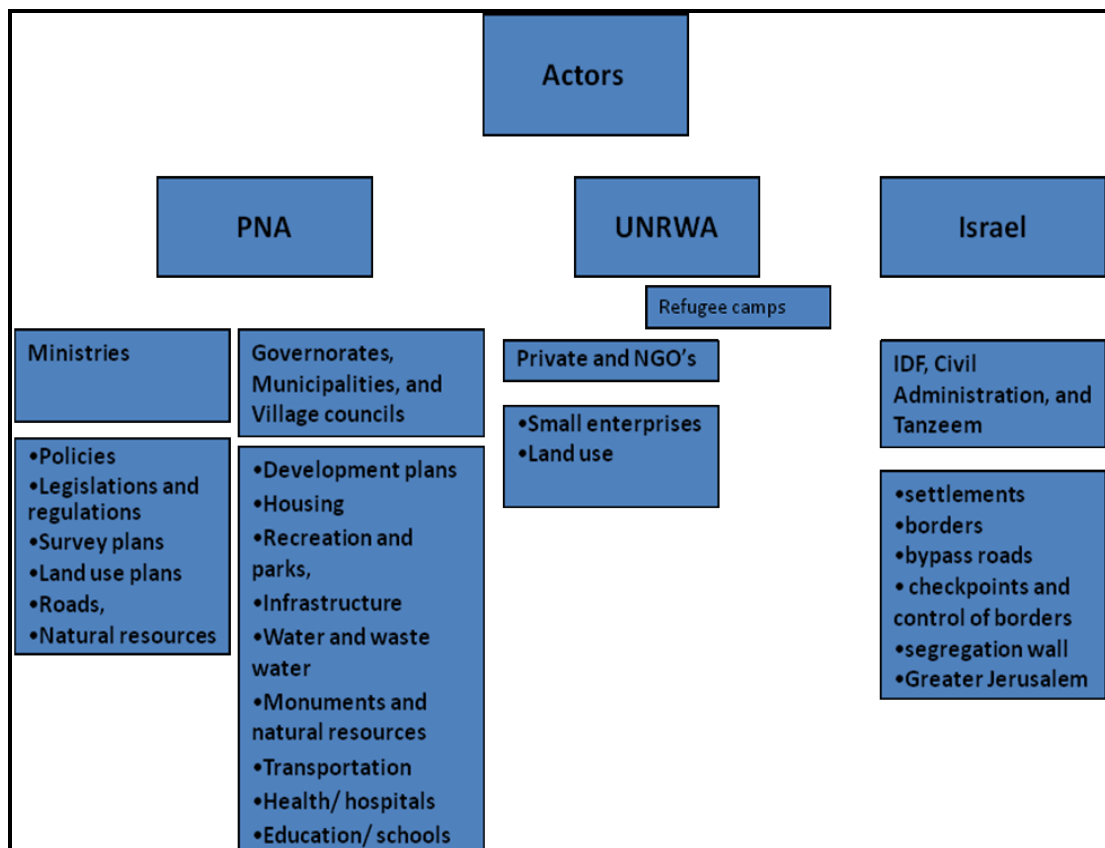
**Figure 3:** The division of the West Bank (“A” “B” “C” areas) according to Oslo agreement.

Source: [www.passia.org](http://www.passia.org)

### 4.3. Main Actors in landscape planning of the West Bank after the 1990's

Special political conditions under which the West Bank exists since the onset of the Palestinian National Authority, where the area of the West Bank has been divided into three different administrative and political divisions, and hence, diverse actors and players rule out the existing planning process, especially those related to landscape. Amongst the most important actors of landscape into the West Bank who made and influential change in landscape are (Figure 4):

- i. The Palestinian National Authority, with its restricted control and mandate in spatial planning.
- ii. The United Nation Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA), being responsible for planning of the Refugee camps located in different parts of the West Bank.
- iii. The Israeli Authority that is controlling more than 50% of the West Bank administrative and security wise.

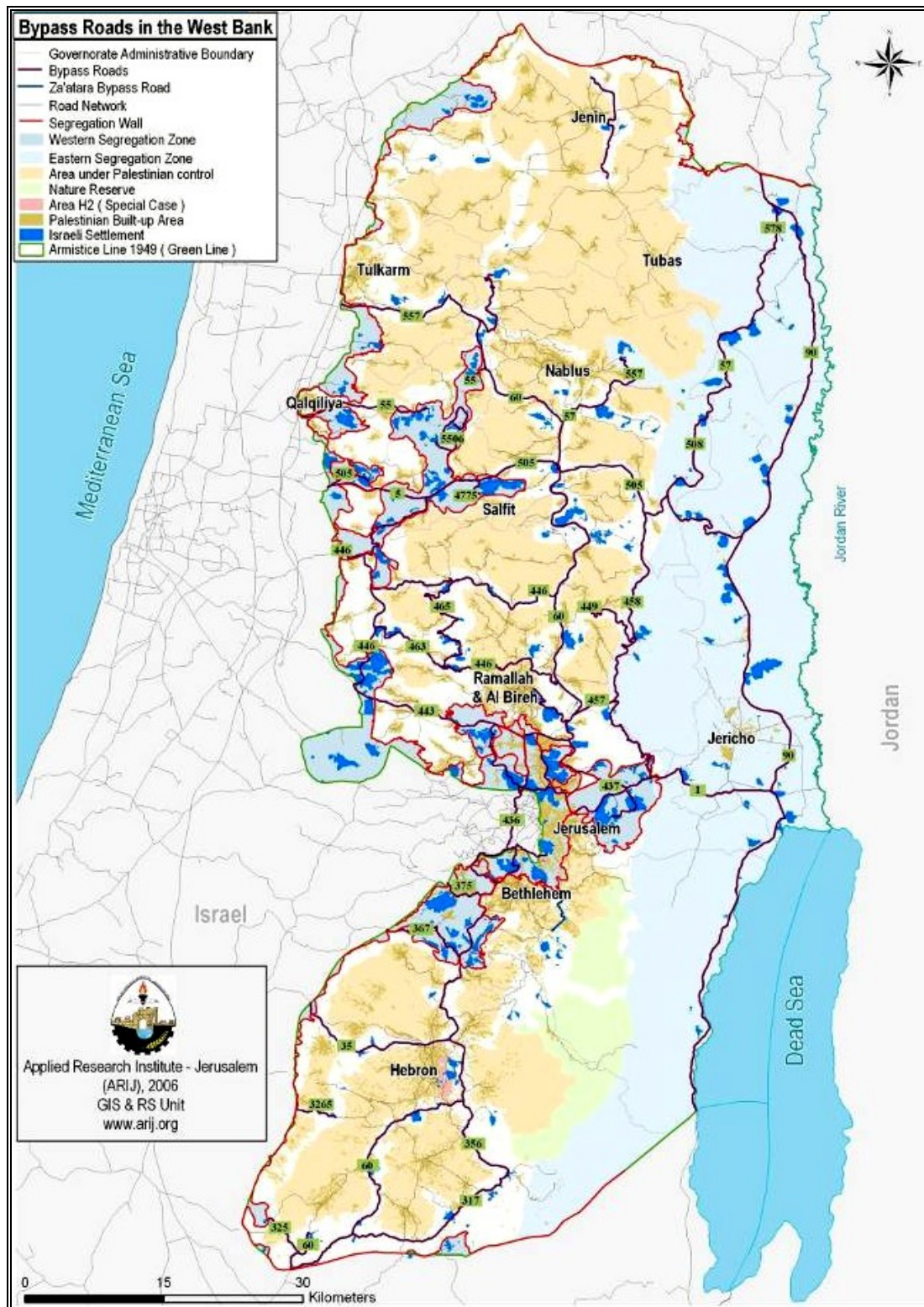


**Figure 4:** Main actors in landscape planning in the West Bank.

#### **4.3.1. The role of the Israeli Occupation in landscape planning**

The Israeli Occupational Authority has taken a set of actual measures and activities that resulted in appreciable changes into the Palestinian landscape; these measures took the form of military planning orders issued by the Israeli Military Authority. Amongst the most important actions that have taken place are:

1. Colonial agglomeration and the associated serving bypass roads: more than 167 agglomerations of Israeli colony were traced out, in addition to a total length of 794 km of Israeli bypass roads that are serving the colonial agglomerations established inside the West Bank (Figure 5). Such agglomerations with its serving networks and infrastructures have resulted in the following landscape effects:
  - i. Put severe restrictions on the Palestinians accessibility to their landscape due to many associated military checkpoints and obstacles, as pretended by the Israeli, for security reasons. Hence, such restrictions decreased the Palestinian level of interests and potential concerns in landscape with continuous landscape deterioration.
  - ii. Confiscation of lands, especially those parts that are being of high level of natural landscape status (i.e. nature reserves and forests), with security being the main claim for such confiscation (Figure 6). Since the 1990 till now, the Israeli occupation has confiscated more than 230 Km<sup>2</sup> for different reasons, amongst is security, expansion of colonies to fit the natural settlers' population growth, and for military purposes.
2. The apartheid wall: when come to its final stage of construction, the apartheid wall will have a route of about 730 Km; will enclose more than 10% of the total West Bank to the West of the wall (about 550 Km<sup>2</sup>). About 92 Palestinian built-up areas with more than 360,000 inhabitants will be totally enclosed and disconnected form their surrounding landscape. It is important in landscape studies that the boundary of any landscape area should be declared precisely, so that any future planning could be attempted without ant obstacles, this is basically due to the fact that the most basic political elements in landscape is its boundary (Jackson J.B., 1984).
3. Destruction of the natural elements of the landscape beauty (Fauna and flora) by the different building and excavation activities associated with the construction of bypass roads, colonies and the apartheid wall.



**Figure 5:** Israeli colonial built-up areas, the associated bypass roads and the enclosing apartheid wall. (Source: Applied Research Institute, Jerusalem).





**Figure 5:** Areas designated as natural reserves and forested areas, which are being ended as Israeli settlement.

#### 4.3.2. The role of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA)

Since its onset on 1993, the Palestinian National Authority has the following planning mandates in areas where it has full control:

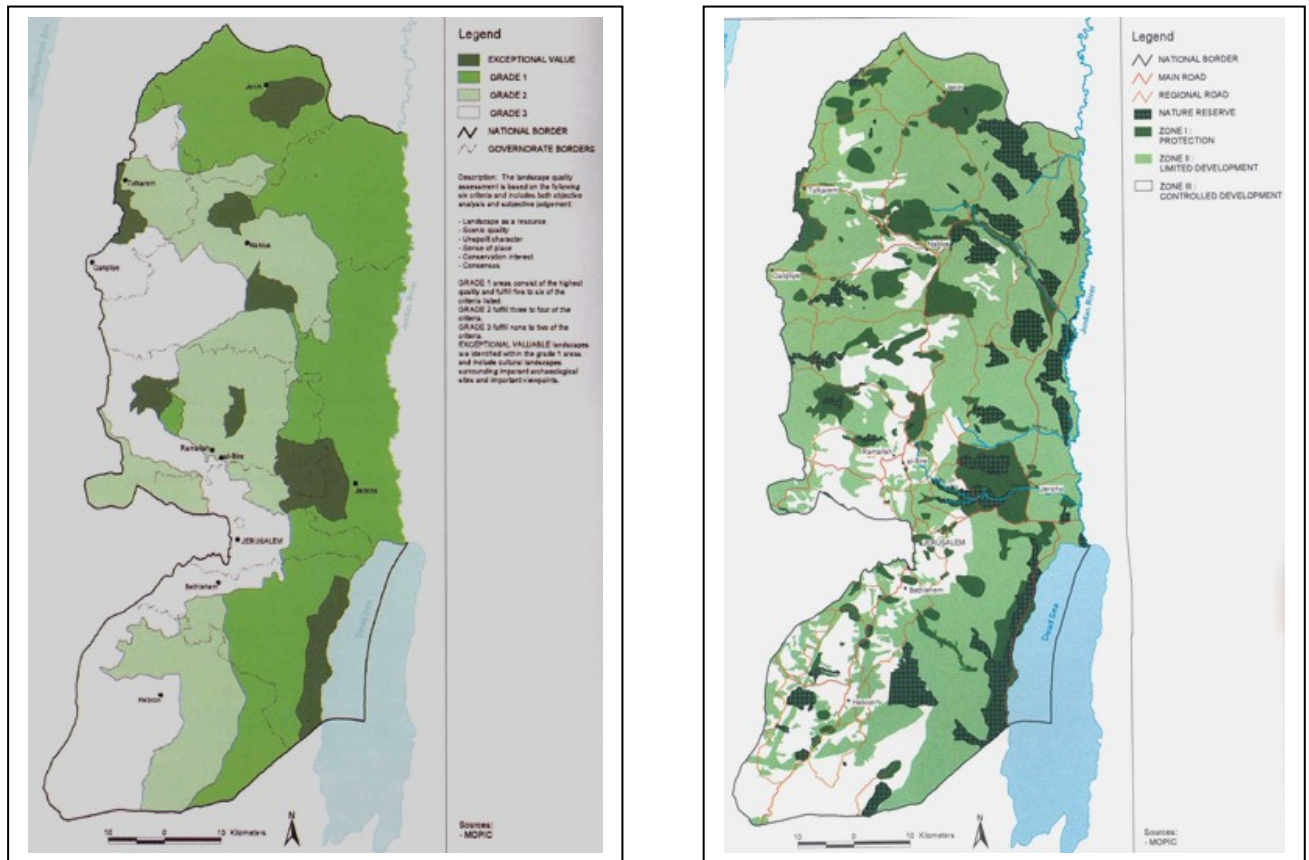
- i. **National level planning:** where the PNA is responsible for the formulation of Policies, put legal framework and structure, defining social, economic, and environmental standards, and identifying national requirements for plans and planning.
- ii. **Regional and local level:** where the associated administrative bodies of the PNA (i.e. Municipalities and village councils) are responsible for the local planning, have to respond to the needs of individual households and persons, and the implementation of local and regional plans.

The main goal and objectives of landscape planning, as formulated by the concerned PNA Ministries and institutions, with local and regional responsibilities, have been set as follow:

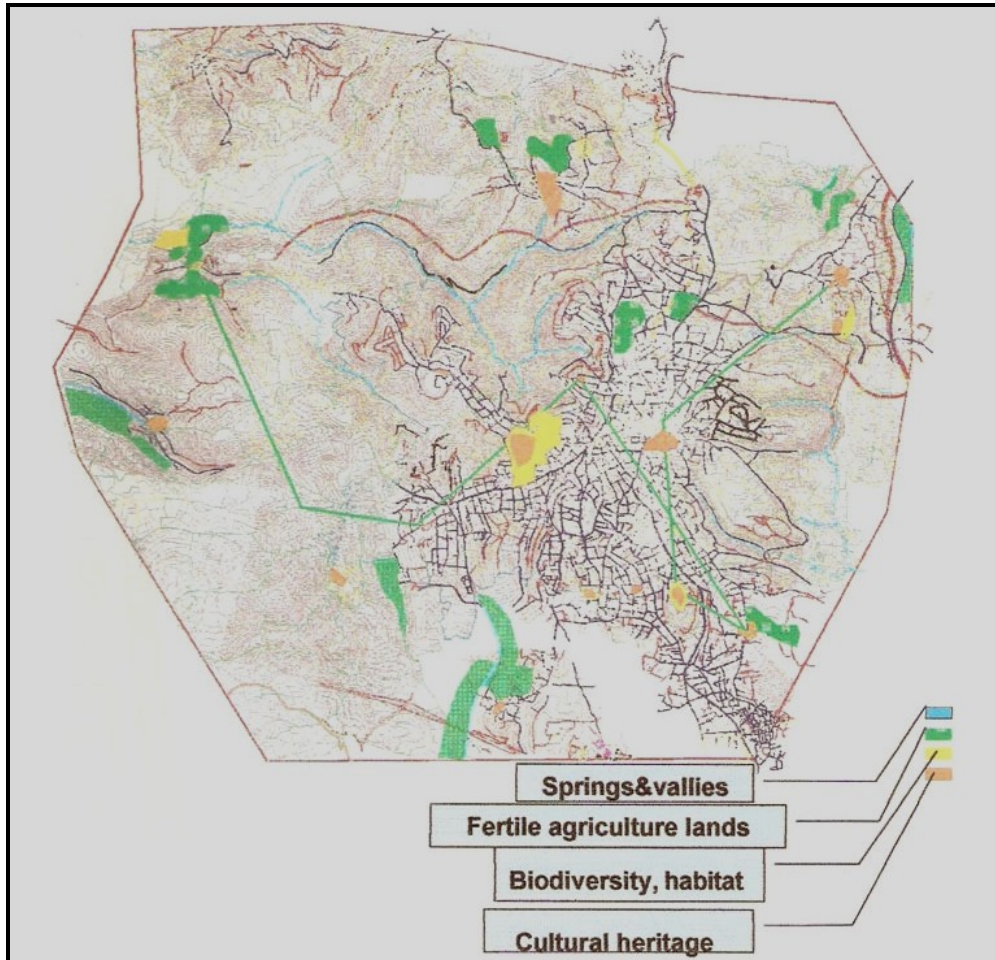
- i. Ensure that land is protected and used in most appropriate way.
- ii. Provide areas for development and at the same time protect the valuable and sensitive natural resources and the natural and cultural landscapes.
- iii. Protect agricultural land as a part of natural resources which will be an asset for economic production, business activities and job opportunities.
- iv. Stop random and environmentally harmful development.
- v. Provide future needs of a growing population.
- vi. Provide needed land for residential, commercial, recreational green areas.
- vii. Ensure the opportunities for development of tourism and recreational utilities.

One the few and unique efforts of the PNA to set a regional plan for landscape protection and management is the study done by the Ministry of Planning and International cooperation (MOPIC) in cooperation with other Ministries entitled **"Emergency Nature resource Protection Plan (ENRPP)"**. The plan has proposed the following landscape- land uses for protection from any future developmental activities:

- Valuable ecological areas, water resources, archaeological and historical sites, agriculturally sensitive areas and outstanding landscapes (Figure 6), have been assessed (MOPIC, 1998a; MOPIC, 1998b; MOPIC, 1999a; MOPIC, 1999b).
- Sensitive and valuable landscapes were surveyed, analyzed, and identified from a spatial and extension (size) point of view.
- Laws and bylaws for the protection of sensitive and valuable landscape areas, from any random and unplanned development, have been suggested.
- Due to the political complications during which the West Bank has passed through, especially after the 2000 uprising, all of the aforementioned plans were not approved, and hence they are not actually operational.
- Recently, a master plan of the suggested metropolitan area of Ramallah and al Bireh has been prepared by the Ministry of Local Government and the Ministry of Planning, with cooperation with other related public and private institutions. The main aim of the master plan was to try to suggest future possibilities for urban expansion and at the same time, to keep appropriate internal landscape and green structure (Figure 7).



**Figure 6:** Suggested areas for landscape and resources' protection according to the ENRPP, as identified by MOPIC.



**Figure 7:** Suggested Metropolitan Ramallah and al Bireh.

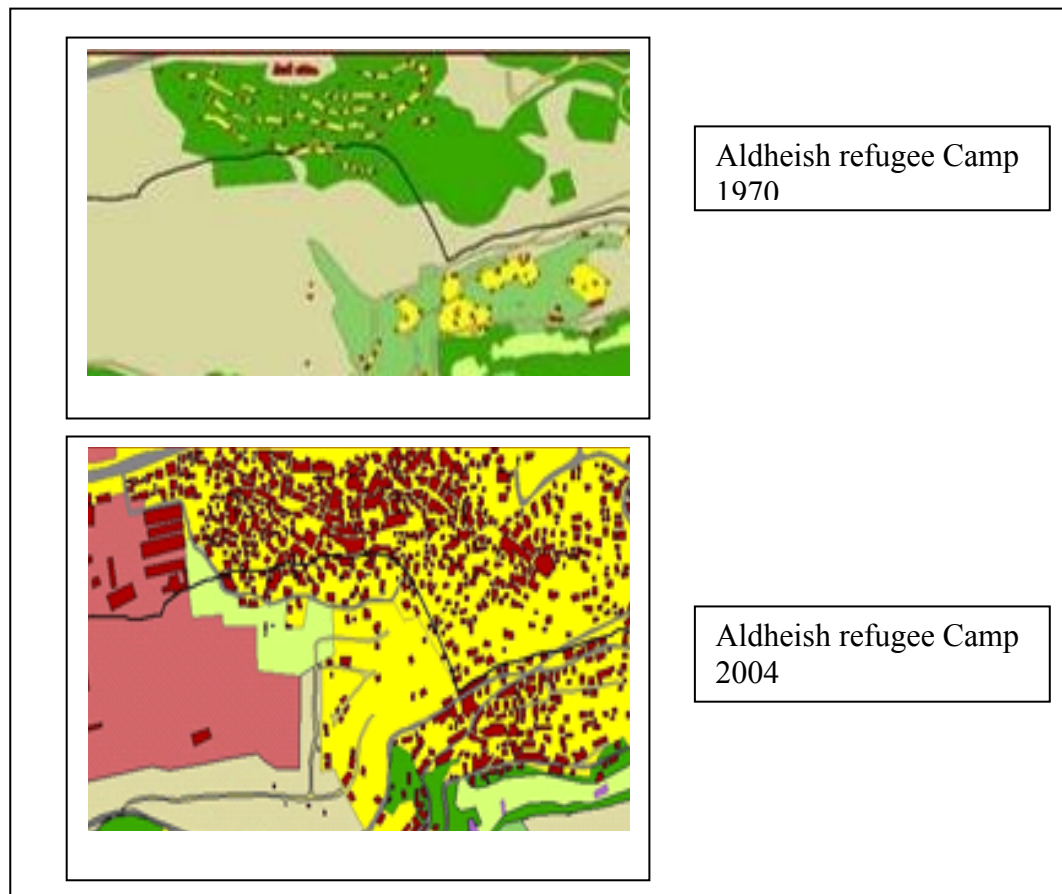
#### **4.3.3. The role of United Nation Relief Work Agency (UNRWA)**

Since 1967 and after the first construction and recognition of the Refugee camps inside the West Bank and Gaza strip, UNRWA has been declared, by the UN, as the main party that facilitates and look after the refugee camps, including planning issues. Since that time, and because the Palestinian Refugees issue was not resolved according to the UN resolutions, the refugee camps was considered as a politically linked issue rather than a human related needs and planning issue. This approach has put strict limitations on dealing with the camps as a planning unit, hence, planning inside camps was almost absent. The characteristics that can describe refugee camps planning can be abbreviated as follow:

- No planning mandate for UNRWA due to the political constraints.
- UNRWA has only the provision of introducing basic services (i.e. education, health, humanitarian aid) to refugees.



- Planning development at refugees' camps is random and does not follow national planning, due to the fact that Refugee Camps constitute a political issue and represents status.
- Due to all of the above mentioned facts, all the refugee camps were condensed into a very limited area focusing only on fulfillment of the refugee housing, with no opportunities, either by UNRWA or the PNA institutions, to think about landscape and green structure inside the camps (Figure 8).

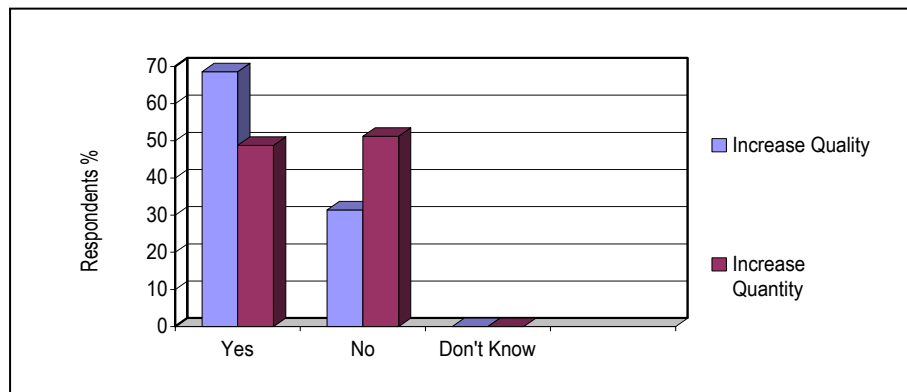


**Figure 8:** Aldheisha refugee camp built-up area during two time periods.

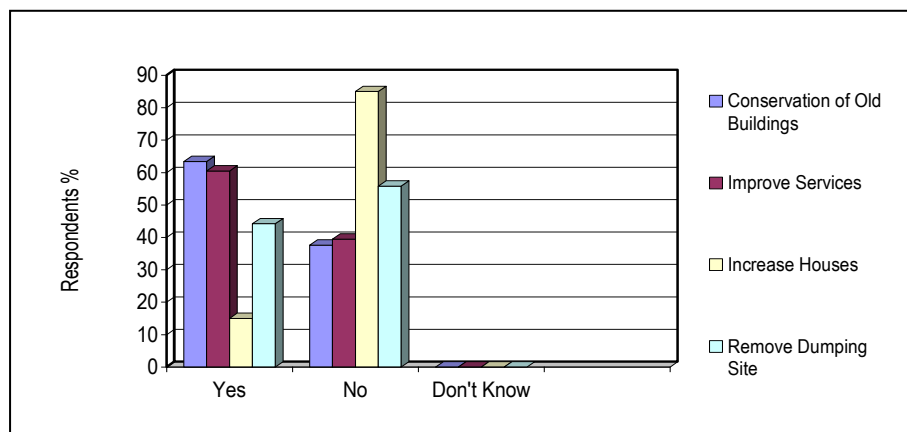
#### 4.3.4. Prospect for future planning improvement and development

Analysis of interviews with key persons showed that 94.9% of the respondents revealed that residential areas lack proper and sufficient development and planning processes, especially in (65%) agricultural areas, which is an important constituent of the green landscape structure (Figure 9), at the same time, about 80% of the respondents indicated the need to improve the built-up internal landscape by adopting the concept of green houses and green areas, emphasizing the needs for such areas for recreation purposes especially for children and women.

Furthermore, respondents stressed the need for rehabilitation of the residential area. This was thought to be important because it the respondents thought that residential areas should be consistent with the natural and historical landscape of the area. They all emphasized the need for basic infrastructure and services (i.e. solid waste collection, street lighting, playgrounds, etc.) as well as applying strict regulations to prevent the random expansion of the residential area and its negative effects on the surrounding landscape (Figure 10).



**Figure 9: Perception of future development for landscape agricultural areas.**



**Figure 10: Perception for future development and planning for residential area.**

#### 4.3.5. Constraints facing landscape planning and development in Palestine

Landscape planning in Palestine is facing two major constraints; political and capacity building. The political constraints can be attributed to the following main factors:

- The existing trend of uncertainty of future political situation.

- The absence of sovereignty over land due to the still existing Israeli occupation.
- The spread of many Israeli colonies, industrial zones, bypass roads and other services and infrastructure associated with colonies.
- The political division of the West Bank into A, B, and C areas, which was the main result of Oslo agreement.
- The lack of sovereignty over borders, resources and economy, that is affecting the population interests in landscape related issues.
- Israeli restrictions order and confiscation of land, and the construction of many military areas and bases.
- The apartheid wall and the many check points spread over the whole West Bank, restricting access to important landscape areas, and in turn planning in different areas.

The constraints related to capacity building can be attributed to the following main factors:

- The absence of proper and sufficient planning system, including environmental and land use planning.
- The lack of planning laws, standards, regulation, and monitoring system, in case of the presence of laws and regulations.
- The absence of clear mandate, which is necessary for proper distribution of responsibilities among stakeholders in planning sector, hindering the development of strategies, policies, and plans for future development.
- The lack of needed resources for planning, such as maps, data bases, etc.
- The lack of professionals and trained human resources in landscape planning.
- The presence of an appreciable gap between academia and practical experience.
- The lack of public awareness on landscape planning and its importance.
- Difficulties in the implementation and enforcement of regulations due to the lack of control by the PNA.

**As a consequence of the aforementioned constraints, the following end results can be mentioned:**

- i. Weak and improper and non integrated planning practices.
- ii. Unclear mandates and weak coordination between stakeholders (Duplication of work in many cases).
- iii. Most of the works done are within the short term perspective and are discord with an overall national plan, especially plans concerned with landscape and land uses.
- iv. The weak, if not the absence, of the Government role.

- v. Severe restrictions (either administrative or political) on the municipal role.
- vi. Limited role of the existing NGOs' and other private institutions that have interests in landscape planning issues.

## 5. Conclusion

1. For proper landscape planning, certain major issues, of political sensitivity, need to be addressed and taken into account such as: Population growth rate, refugees and returnees, and the borders.
2. Two important questions are being addressed: **(i) Is landscape planning feasible under political instability? and (ii) What can we do, as Palestinians, taking into account the current political instability and the unforeseen political process?**
3. **The answer to the previous questions reveals the urgent need for Strategic Interventions that should concentrate on the following issues:**
  - National plan should be ratified, adopted and disseminated, and at the same time coupled with the essential and effective legislations.
  - Enhancement of the planning capacity (the physical and/or the human) at landscape relevant ministries
  - Achieve efficient cooperation and coordination across stakeholders of landscape issues.
  - Empower the capacity of local authorities (Municipalities and village councils) to take more active role in planning and implementation of national, regional and local plans.
  - Widen up the landscape awareness across the society, where educational institutions can play an important role.